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**D**o you know what the second leading cause of personal injury is among shipboard Sailors—next to vehicle crashes? It's the third overall leading cause of injury (next to vehicle crashes and overexertion) when you consider both on- and off-duty arenas.

Here are some clues. The problem is just as prevalent at home as it is at work. It's a dangerous problem and even can be fatal—at any age. It can happen any time of day or night—even while you're sleeping. And, although it causes considerable lost work time and disability, it's the most preventable of all mishaps.

In case you haven't figured out what problem I'm talking about, it's falls. Here are some typical examples from messages I read daily:

☛ An E-1 was going from a ship's main-deck passageway to a berthing compartment when he lost his balance and fell down the ladder. He suffered a broken arm and lost an estimated 30 workdays.

☛ An E-5 got off watch after sunset and decided to go to the ship's 02 level. He subsequently fell about 60 feet down an open escape trunk and had to be taken to a naval hospital for orthopedic and general surgery. He lost an estimated 29 workdays.

☛ An E-3 and several friends had an informal picnic. He drank a large amount of alcohol before returning to the ship's berthing barge. After being aboard about 20 minutes, he fell while trying to get out of his rack and cut himself behind his right ear on a rack locker. He then went to a secured area to smoke a cigarette. When told to get down, he ran



Navy photo by PH1 Jeffrey Truett

An E-5 fell down an open escape trunk similar to the one this Sailor is exiting during a fire drill in a ship's main-machinery space.

☛ Early one morning, an E-5 was trying to wake up his wife. He started jumping on the bed because she wouldn't wake up. When he jumped off the bed to go to the head, he didn't see a suitcase in the floor until it was too late. He landed awkwardly on his right foot, breaking it and dislocating three toes. Doctors had to insert three screws and one pin, and the E-5 lost an estimated 39 workdays.

☛ An O-2 was at his condominium, located on the fourth floor, when he decided to take his golf clubs to his car in the basement parking lot.

## I'm Down, And I Can

to the edge of the barge and tried to climb down the side, instead of using the ladder. He slipped and fell 10 feet, shattering his ankle. He was taken to a naval hospital for surgery and lost an estimated 90 workdays.

Instead of using the elevator, he was hurrying down the stairs, with the golf bag on his right shoulder and his left hand lightly gripping the railing. As he came to the first landing, he immediately turned to the next set of stairs but missed the first step, caus-

ing him to lose his balance. He lunged forward, releasing his golf bag in an effort to break his fall. He landed on his head, cutting his right temple, bruising and breaking his left arm, and breaking his lower right leg. Staying conscious, he pulled himself up the stairs and into his condominium, where he called a co-worker for help. He lost an estimated 60 workdays.

☛ An E-5 had spent a liberty day with shipmates, wandering around the city. After a long day and a few drinks, they went to a local restaurant to eat and relax before returning to the ship. While climbing a set of stairs, the E-5's foot slipped between two steps and lodged in such a way that his momentum caused the leg to break in four places. He lost an estimated 240 workdays.

☛ An O-3 attended a Halloween-costume party at an off-base dance club. His costume included stockings worn over his shoes. The dance club has a dance floor that rises 18 inches above ground level and is not lighted. When party attendees gathered on the dance floor for a group photograph, the O-3 slipped off and fractured his left ankle. He spent 12 days in a hospital and another 21 days on convalescent leave.

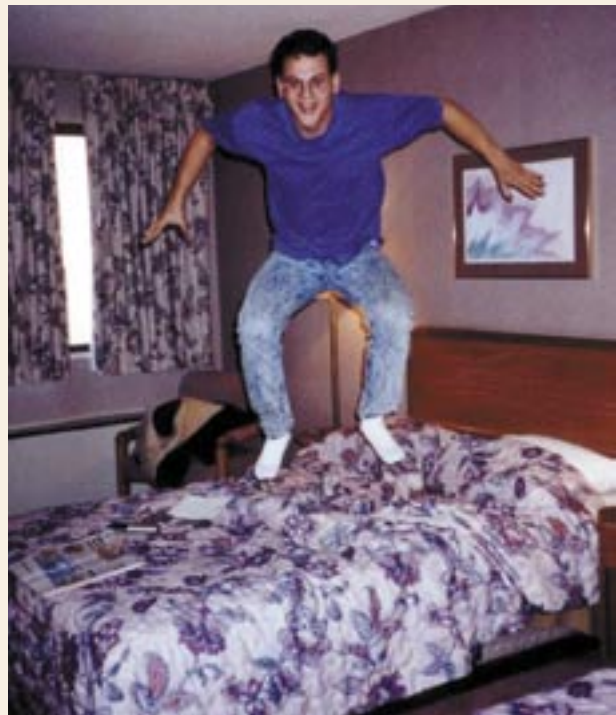
How can we prevent such mishaps? Start by using the first step in ORM: Identify hazards.

The first and most significant hazard is that we walk upright, on only two legs—a feat that began 3.2 million years ago when *Australopithecus afarensis* (Lucy) became the first in our ancestry to walk bipedal (standing up). While this development led to changes and technical uses of our hands, it also meant we no longer could outclimb or outrun

## n't Get Up

our predators (hazard). It also meant we had to develop a better sense of balance to keep from falling over.

It's interesting to note that one of Lucy's bones had a healed break that may have been the result of



A Sailor who tried this tactic to awaken his wife ended up breaking his foot and dislocating three toes. He landed awkwardly when he jumped off the bed.

a fall. Unfortunately, balance on two feet is inherently unstable, so it doesn't take much to upset a person.

There are different types of falls. In a **trip and fall**, an unseen object causes the person to fall. In a **step and fall**, an unexpected step down is encountered, resulting in loss of balance and fall. In a **slip and fall** (most common), the center of gravity is thrown out of balance, resulting in a fall. In an **oh-no and fall**, a ladder, roof or platform we're standing on goes out from under us.

To prevent such unfortunate occurrences, always walk defensively, remove obstacles and slippery substances from walkways, wear non-slip shoes, and, if you have to leave the ground, use a stable platform. Remember, too, that balance-altering substances such as alcohol and medications are likely to amplify the quantity and severity of fall injuries. ➡